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UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE — Radio Service — OFFICE OF INFORMATION

HOMEMAKERS' CHAT

Tuesday Feb., 6, 1940

(FOR BROADCAST USE ONLY)

Subject: "MEAT QUESTIONS." Information from the Bureau of Home Economics, and the Bureau of Animal Industry. U.S.D.A.

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Among the letters in this week's mailbag are a number from up-and-coming housewives interested in knowing the latest and best ways of cooking meat. All the questions today are housewives' questions about meat. The answers all come from meat cookery scientists of the Department of Agriculture.

To baste or not to baste--that's the first question. (Of course, every experienced housewife knows that basting is moistening meat with melted fat or drippings or fat and water during cooking. Basting is to keep meat from drying out on the surface.) Now let me read you this first question, just as it is written:" My mother taught me to baste a roast frequently as it cooked. But my neighbor tells me basting is old-fashioned and out of date. She says if the roast is placed fat side up in the pan, basting is not necessary."

The meat cookery scientists agree with your neighbor. They say if a roast is set in an open pan, fat side up, the fat melts and runs down over the meat. The roast thus bastes itself and you don't have to bother.

The second letter up for answer today is about rib roast of beef. Says this letter: "Which is better--a rib roast of beef with the bones left in or a boned and rolled roast?"

Some people prefer the boned and rolled roast because it is easy to carve. But tests have showed that a roast with the bones left in is better in flavor and juiciness and takes less time to cook.

Here's another question about cooking roast beef: "Is it true that searing a roast with a very high temperature when it first goes in to cook helps hold the juices in?"

That's what cooks used to believe. But recent investigations in meat cookery laboratories have proved the contrary. You can sear meat or not as you please, as far as loss of juice is concerned. But you will save time and trouble and fuel if you roast your meat at an even moderate temperature. The flavor and tenderness inside the roast is the same whether you sear meat at the start or keep your oven moderate throughout the cooking.

Now up comes an old familiar question: "What is the best way to cook a tough cut of meat to make it tender?"

Every housewife who uses the inexpensive cuts of meat needs to know the answer to that question. And the answer is: You can make a tough cut tender in a number of different ways.

The general rule for cooking any less tender cut of meat is this: Use long slow cooking and moist heat. Tender cuts like roasts and steaks and chops you can cook with the dry heat of roasting or broiling. But the tougher cuts need long slow moist cooking with some liquid. This rule applies to stew and pot roast and Swiss steak and a number of familiar meat dishes made with less tender cuts.

Acid also helps make meat tender. It assists in softening up the connective tissues in the meat. If you cook meat with tomatoes, the acid in the tomato helps make the meat tender. Or you can let meat stand for some hours before cooking in a mixture of vinegar or lemon juice and oil to help make the meat tender. (Adding seasoning to the acid-and-oil mixture, gives the meat unusual and interesting flavors.)

One way to make a tough cut of meat tender without long slow cooking is to grind the meat in a meat grinder. Then you can cook it by broiling or by any one of a number of quick-cooking methods. Another way is to pound the meat which breaks up the connective tissues.

The best way to make tough meat tender depends on the dish you want to make, you see.

Now here's a question about the color of beef. A housewife says that when she buys a steak at the butcher shop, she often notices that the meat sometimes is dark red and sometimes is a very bright red. She wants to know whether this difference in the red color has anything to do with the quality of the beef.

Mr. O. G. Hankins of the Bureau of Animal Industry says: "Normally when beef is cut, it tends to be rather dark. It brightens up on exposure to air. Beef takes about 30 minutes in the air to take on its maximum red color. After this first change in color, meat gradually becomes darker as it is stored in the refrigerator.

Aside from these normal changes in color, occasionally you find what is called 'dark-cutting' beef. Such beef brightens little or not at all after cutting. Research workers are trying to find the cause of this 'dark-cutting' beef."

Well, there are the answers to your questions about basting a roast, boned and bone in roasts, searing meat, cooking tough cuts, and bright red and dark red beef. That takes care of the meat questions for the time being. Next Tuesday questions from gardeners will be on schedule.

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